We claim:

1   1. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising

2   the steps of:

3   identifying a plurality of tracked symbols;

4   initializing a plurality of running counts, each running count corresponding

5   to a tracked symbol;

6   generating an outcome represented by a plurality of symbols;

7   determining an occurrence of at least one of the tracked symbols;

8   selecting a running count which corresponds to the occurrence of at least

9   one of the tracked symbols;

10   adjusting the selected running count; and

11   determining a bonus payout based on the selected running count.

1   2. The method of claim 1 in which:

2   the step of adjusting includes one of:

3   adding a predetermined integer value to the selected running count;

4   and

5   subtracting a predetermined integer value from the selected running

6   count.

1   3. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   identifying an expiration condition representing a number of plays after

3   which an occurrence of at least one of the tracked symbols expires; and

4   determining an expiration of an occurrence of at least one of the tracked

5   symbols based on the expiration condition.

1   4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   identifying an expiration condition representing a time after which an

3   occurrence of at least one of the tracked symbols expires; and

4   determining an expiration of an occurrence of at least one of the tracked

5   symbols based on the expiration condition.

1   5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   determining a payout based on the outcome;

3   determining whether the payout equals zero; and

4   in which the step of determining an occurrence is performed only if the

5   payout equals zero.

1   6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   storing the running counts on a player tracking card, and

3   in which each running count includes status data representing an expiration

4   condition of each occurrence of a tracked symbol.

1   7. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   storing the running count at a slot server, and

3   in which each running count includes status data representing an expiration

4   criterion of each occurrence of a tracked symbol.

1   8. The method of claim 1 in which

2   determining a bonus payout further comprises:

3   determining the bonus payout based on a number of plays of the slot

4   machine.

1   9. The method of claim 1 in which the step of

2   determining a bonus payout further comprises:

3   determining the bonus payout based on a duration of time. .

1   10. The method of claim 1 in which each running count represents occurrences of a

2   tracked symbol generated by a second slot machine.

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1   11. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   receiving a wager; and

3   in which the step of determining a bonus payout further comprises:

4   determining the bonus payout based on a wager amount.

1   12. The method of claim 1 in which each tracked symbol includes:

2   at least one bonus symbol which contributes to the corresponding running

3   count;

4   at least one offsetting symbol; and

5   in which adjusting the selected running count further comprise:

6   subtracting occurrences of the at least one offsetting symbol.

1   13. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

2   determining a payout, and

3   determining a bonus payout comprises

4   determining a multiplier to be applied to the payout.

1   14. The method of claim 1 in which

2   determining a bonus payout includes

3   determining points for a slot play reward system.

1   15. The method of claim 14 further comprising:

2   determining a payout for expired occurrences of a tracked symbol.

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4   16. The method of claim 1 in which the slot machine comprises a reel slot

5   machine, and the symbols comprise reel symbols.

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1   17. The method of claim 16 in which the reel slot machine includes

2   a symbol display window and

3   a payout line that is visible within the symbol display window; and

4   in which determining an occurrence comprises:

5   selecting at least one tracked symbol from amongst all symbols

6   displayed in the symbol display window.

1   18. The method of claim 16 in which

2   determining an occurrence includes

3   selecting the at least one tracked symbol from amongst symbols on

4   one specified reel of the reel slot machine.

1   19. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising

2   the steps of:

3   identifying a plurality of tracked symbols;

4   associating a predetermined expiration condition with each occurrence of

5   each tracked symbol after which each occurrence is expired;

6   generating a plurality of running counts, each running count corresponding

7   to a tracked symbol; and

8   identifying a bonus payout based on at least one running count.

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1   20. A method comprising:

2   identifying a plurality of tracked symbols, each having associated therewith

3   an expiration condition after which the tracked symbol is expired;

4   generating a running count for each tracked symbol, including

5   adding to the running count for a new occurrences of the tracked

6   symbol and

7   subtracting from the running count for expired occurrences of the

8   tracked symbol, thereby determining an ongoing count of active occurrences of

9   each tracked symbol;

10   identifying a bonus value; and

11   generating a bonus payout when at least one of the running counts exceeds

12   the bonus value.

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